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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI POLICE RAID JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
GATHERING, DETAIN SIX FOREIGNERS

Classified By: Acting DCM Joan Polaschik for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) According to UK Charge Colin Wells and UK Emboff Chris Gotch (strictly protect), GOAJ Interior Ministry police raided a gathering of over a hundred Jehovah's Witnesses taking place December 24, 2006 at a private home in Baku. Police briefly detained and released the overwhelming majority of the participants, most of whom were Azerbaijani citizens. However, police transferred six foreign nationals - including one UK citizen of Azerbaijani origin (Chingiz Huseynov) - to immigration detention on charges of illegally proselytizing their religions. Two Georgian nationals among the six foreign detainees have since been deported; however the remaining four individuals - the British citizen, a Dutch citizen and two Russians - remain in immigration detention in Baku.

¶2. (C) British Charge reported that UK Embassy officials were denied consular access to the UK national until December 30. UK Emboffs report that GOAJ officials said that Minister of Internal Affairs Usubov needed to personally sign off on consular access which took a week to obtain. British officials protested the delayed consular access verbally and by diplomatic note. Gotch told poloff that he visited the British national on December 31 and also incidentally met with the Dutch and Russian detainees at the immigration detention center. He said that the detainees were in good condition and reported no complaints about their treatment in custody. Separately, GOAJ officials told British officials the four remaining detainees would most likely be deported within ten days. Immigration officials privately told UK Emboff that the immigration agency's 2007 budget was not available to them yet and that the delay in deportation was due to the time it would take to procure the funding to carry out the action.

¶3. (C) Comment: Azerbaijan's law on religious freedom prohibits proselytizing by foreigners. The GOAJ has more often focused enforcement of this law on the activities of Muslim groups perceived to be threatening or subversive. However, the GOAJ (through the State Religious Committee or the Interior Ministry) also has a history of enforcing the proselytizing ban on non-traditional, minority religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. In previous conversations with poloff, State Committee officials have confided that while they do not believe the Jehovah's Witnesses to be dangerous or threatening, the group's activities nonetheless violate Azerbaijan's restriction on religious proselytizing. (Previous State Religious Committee Chairman Rafiq Aliyev publicly denounced non-traditional religious groups, calling them sects.) We previously advised Jehovah's Witnesses that GOAJ officials believed the group to be violating the legal prohibition on religious proselytizing. Poloff will raise the Jehovah's Witnesses' case with the Deputy Chairman of the State Religious Committee and separately, with the Deputy Prosecutor, in

upcoming January meetings. (All GOAJ offices are closed in observance of local holidays until January 8.)
HYLAND